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# News Release

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Illegal Slaughterhouse Operator Pleads Guilty

(Phoenix) -- The Arizona Department of Agriculture and the Maricopa County Attorney's Office today announced a guilty plea in the case of Jose Merced Serrato-Maciel (d.o.b. 8-6-59), who admitted operating an unlicensed slaughterhouse at 6808 South 107 Avenue, in Tolleson. The defendant had been illegally selling insect-laden and disease-causing meat products to the public and was fined \$3,700 and sentenced to three years of probation.

"This kind of illegal business endangers the health of the citizens of our community. No one wants to become ill from tainted food, so the law is there to help keep our food supply safe," said Thomas.

The Arizona Department of Agriculture investigated the makeshift slaughterhouse and found that animals were being slaughtered in an outdoor facility and left exposed to insects and rodents. Inspectors posing as customers purchased meat which tested positive for Salmonella. Investigators observed pigs being shot with a rifle and scalded in hot water to remove hair, then butchered by a team of at least ten men. In one two-hour period, dozens of pigs and goats were slaughtered and sold for cash. State officials submitted the case to the County Attorney for prosecution.

The County Attorney's Office obtained a restraining order in September of 2005 to force Serrato-Maciel to stop operating the slaughterhouse, and charged him with health code and licensing violations. Serrato-Maciel had been warned previously about the requirements for slaughtering livestock for sale.

According to the Arizona Department of Agriculture, meat processed without necessary sanitary controls can spread many disease-causing organisms, including E. coli, Salmonella, Staphylococcus aureus and Listeria monocytogenes.

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